DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 282 PS 010 999

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TITLE Kindergarten: All Day Every Day?
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the National Conference of the Association for Childhood Education International (St. Louis, MO, April 8-13, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Achievement; Comparative Analysis; Early Childhood Education; *Kindergarten; Kindergarten Children; *Learning Readiness; Performance Criteria; *Scheduling; School Schedules; *Time Factors (Learning)
IDENTIFIERS *All Day Kindergarten; *Half Day Kindergarten

ABSTRACT

This paper reports findings that all-day every-day educational programs have positive effects on kindergarten children. Also included is a Minnesota Association for Childhood Education (MACE) position paper which advocates the provision of full-day kindergarten programs and details seven criteria that a quality full-day program must meet. Efforts to measure kindergarten performance among children experiencing three attendance patterns (all-day every-day, half-day every-day, all-day alternate-day) are briefly discussed. (Author/RH)

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Paper presented at ACEI Study Conference, St. Louis, Mo., 1979

ED179282

PS 010999

kindergarten: all day every day?

Historically, the development of kindergartens reflects more concern with curriculum (or lack of curriculum) than with length of attendance. In fact, Froebel only briefly referred to the length of the kindergarten day: "On Tuesday, the Rodolstadt Kindergarten (one of the first established) was opened from 2 to 4 in the afternoon with 24 charming children varying from 2 to 5 years old, accompanied by their mothers, by some fathers and a few other relatives."[1] However, soon the kindergarten became a longer day. Gorton comments that "historically, kindergartens began as full-day programs. The half-day programs developed in response to the need to accommodate larger numbers of children."[2] Customarily, in the United States, the extended day or the full day was typical for kindergarten children. Often these experiences were in rural one-room schools, where the youngest child attended the same length of day as any other child.

Apparently, World War II influenced a cut-back to half-day kindergartens. With the shortage of teachers while the men were in the armed services, together with a shortage of classroom building space and an increased birth rate, most kindergartens became half day every day.

All-day kindergartens surfaced again the the 60s and 70s. The U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare reports in the 1969-70 school year, 13.8% of children enrolled in kindergartens were attending full day.[3] Many of these programs were in Hawaii, which had all-day every-day kindergartens since 1955.[4]

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It must be noted that many other countries in the world have all-day every-day school for the child of kindergarten age. The British Infant School has such a pattern for children age 4 and nearing 5. In Belguim, 90% of the children 3 to 5 years of age attend school from 8:30 to 4:15. In France, children 2 to 5 years of age attend school for 6 hours per day; 23% of the 2 year olds, 70% of the threes, 93% of the fours and 96% of the fives are enrolled in these programs.[5] Kindergarten programs in Russia are scheduled from 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.[6]

Available contemporary research is not always clearly defined. Sometimes the investigation relates to only one attendance pattern in isolation: either all day every day or all day alternate day or half day every day or some other arrangement. Sometimes the research reports a comparison of two of these options. Rarely are three or more attendance patterns compared.

Mueller[7] reports evidence that at the end of Grade Three, all-day kindergarten children evidenced greater achievement than others on a Grade Three reading test and Kuhlmann Anderson Verbal I.Q.

Shreveport, La., a participant in the 222 Selected Programs for the Right to Read, was reported in research indicating the all-day kindergarten program, as one phase of that district-wide Continuous Progress Program in Reading, yielded effective reading results.[8]

As another of the 222 Selected Programs, Cincinnati, Ohio, reported similar findings. The all-day every-day kindergarten children shifted from the 44th to the 75th national percentile on the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts. I.Q. scores, measured on the PPVT, rose from 83.9 to 91.2, significant beyond the one percent level.[9]

Nieman[10] presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association which compared three groups of children: children who had had preschool, half-day kindergarten children who had had preschool and half-day kindergarteners. At the end of Grade Two, empirical longitudinal evidence indicated a positive relationship between test scores and the amount of time the child has experienced prekindergarten and kindergarten programs. "This positive relationship exists independent of a wide range of teaching styles, materials, and methodologies. Findings are based on four years of observations with five different standardized tests. Results show significant differences in I.Q., readiness, and achievement at the end of preschool, kindergarten, first, and second grade."

A study conducted during 1969-70 in the Cincinnati Public Schools[11] reported significantly higher performance on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test among children attending all-day kindergarten class than for children attending the traditional half-day classes. As the program continued for 1970-71, results of the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test indicated almost double the mean for the all-day kindergarten children compared with the half-day kindergarten children.[12]

Lysiak and Evans[13] compared 7 kindergarten curricula in relation to socioeconomic status and kindergarten attendance pattern. Full-day programs were favored for the low SES children in all curricula. Children in the high SES measured higher on the full-day program using some materials.

The Minnesota State Department of Education[14] reported research comparing half-day every-day with all-day alternate-day kindergartens. Children who attended daily had significantly higher scores on naming numbers 1 to 9 and knowledge of the sounds of the letters.

Authorities have discussed advantages and disadvantages of the all-day every-day, all-day alternate-day, and half-day every-day kindergarten attendance patterns. The Penn Trafford School District[15] of Harrison City, Pa., investigated the value of these attendance patterns, although they did not have the opportunity to implement the findings. Based on a plan devised by the Fort Myer Elementary School of Arlington, Virginia, the proposal recommended extending the kindergarten from half day to full day.

As a result of a study by E. Johnson,[16] full-day kindergartens at three elementary schools in Somerset County will be continued. The Fergusson-Florissant School District[17] (Missouri) have been involved with all-day every-day kindergartens: thirteen of the 17 elementary schools provide for all-day every-day kindergarten.

The Mn. ACE, issued a position paper on Sept. 11, 1971:

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTENS

Position Adopted by the Executive Board of the
Minnesota Association for Childhood Education
September 11, 1971

The Minnesota Association for Childhood Education believes that kindergarten is a vital and important school experience for all children. It is a year in which positive or negative attitudes toward school are formed. It should also be a year in which a child's strengths and weaknesses may be assessed and programs planned which will meet his individual needs, his interests, his particular level of maturity and his unique mode of learning. To meet the challenge set by the above statement requires that each child be respected and given individual attention and that teachers learn to know him as a unique personality. Therefore, we believe that a good quality full-day kindergarten should be a goal toward which school districts should strive.

The Minnesota Association for Childhood Education believes that a quality full-day kindergarten program must meet these criteria:

1. The full-day program should provide more time for the child to engage in activities that will provide him an opportunity to learn at an unhurried pace so that he can get from each experience all that he is able to understand at any given time. It will provide time for him to become deeply involved in play experiences so that from them he may develop concepts that are vital to later learning experiences. It will also provide time for the more formally structured experiences that are also a part of a good kindergarten program. This also means that space must be available so that materials with which a child is working may be left undisturbed so that he may return to his work with them the next day and develop more fully his ideas and interests.

2. A full day in kindergarten should be approximately four hours, including the lunch hour. In some instances longer days may be necessary. In that case provision must be made for an extended rest period and cots and blankets should be available.

3. The quality kindergarten program must provide a balance of activities including activities that require the use of large muscles such as block building, and many kinds of vigorous outdoor play, opportunities for dramatic play, quiet times in which music and stories may be enjoyed, opportunities to work with a wide variety of appropriate art media and rest. Five year olds are not ready for long periods of quiet, small muscle activities. However, they need to have some quiet activities and the opportunity to choose these when they want to.

4. A quality kindergarten program must provide space and materials that will stimulate a wide variety of learning experiences for children and guidance in their use. These should be learning experiences which would be difficult, if not impossible, for parents to provide in their homes.

5. A quality kindergarten program must provide for an individualized program for children. Therefore, each teacher should work with one group of children.

6. Parent education should be an integral part of a quality kindergarten program. Planning for this and executing it takes time. Therefore, the kindergarten day needs to provide time for this as well as time for teacher-parent conferences.

7. A quality kindergarten program should provide continuity from one day to the next day.

The Minnesota Association for Childhood Education recognizes that such a program would be costly. The Association also recognizes that recent developments in elementary education, namely, the individualization of instruction and the emphasis upon diagnostic teaching, are making greater demands upon the kindergarten and the kindergarten teacher. For this reason the inadequacies of the traditional half-day kindergarten are becoming increasingly apparent and new programs must be developed. It is especially important during this period of rising costs that changes made in kindergarten programs lead to quality rather than to maintaining the status-quo under different administrative procedures. It is also important the welfare of children holds the highest priority when developing new programs. Thus, consideration must be given to the health factors, emotional growth of the child, as well as to the intellectual development.

In an effort to measure kindergarten performance among children experiencing the three attendance patterns (all-day every-day, half-day every-day, all-day alternate-day), this investigator conducted a brief study in 1974 and a fuller study which is now in progress.

In the Spring of 1974, the brief study involved children in three kindergartens whose teachers were graduate students of this author. Each of the teachers/graduate students taught a class of children representing one of the attendance patterns. The Metropolitan Readiness Test[17] was administered in May of that year. Significant differences were found between the all-day alternate-day group and each of the other groups. In some instances, differences were found between the all-day every-day and the half-day every-day; wherever differences existed, they favored the all-day every-day group.

This year, 1978-79, this author has been involved in a follow-up study. Children in kindergartens for each of these attendance patterns have been pre-tested in October, 1978; they will be post-tested in May of 1979.

Several aspects ot this study are especially relevant: The three attendance patterns will again be investigated. In addition, two other factors will be pursued: 1) ITBS scores for the children from the 1974 study will be obtained; these children are now completing Grade Five. 2) Due to local school administrative decisions, the attendance patterns in two of the schools have been changed. One school, which was all-day every-day in 1974 is now all-day alternate-day. Another school, which was all-day alternate-day in 1974 is now half-day every-day. In each instance, the teacher is the same person in 1974 and 1978-79, the curriculum is the same, the school and community are the same. Differences relate to attendance pattern.

It will be crucial to know the outcomes of these comparisons. My hunch is that the all-day every-day will exce . regardless of teacher or community. My expectation is that the all-day alternate-day will be lowest in each measure, regardless of teacher or community.

Let us pursue further this matter, so that lives of children will not be mismanaged or lost in the economic competition of today.

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